

Nuclear Deterrence and Disarmament After The Cold War

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**This paper was prepared for submittal to the
Fifth International Arms Control Conference
Dallas, Texas
November 19, 1994**

March 1995



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NUCLEAR DETERRENCE AND DISARMAMENT AFTER THE COLD WAR

Remarks Presented at the Fifth International Arms Control Conference,

The John Goodwin Tower Center for Political Studies,

Southern Methodist University

By

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During the Cold War, nuclear arms control measures were shaped significantly by nuclear doctrine. Consequently, the negotiation of arms control agreements often became a battleground for different nuclear strategies. Today, both nuclear weapons policies and arms control objectives are again being reviewed. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union has been declared over. The Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact no longer exist. Deployed strategic nuclear forces have been reduced significantly. The START I and START II treaties, if implemented, will keep Russia and the United States busy dismantling much of the remaining nuclear stockpile for many years to come, and U.S. President William Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin have recently agreed to explore even greater reductions once the START reductions are more firmly on track.

In this revolutionary context, the United States recently concluded its Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). Early press reports anticipated fundamental changes in long standing U.S. doctrine and force posture. To the surprise of many, the NPR announced by the Clinton Administration was cautious in its outcome and qualified in its presentation. Why?

Many political and bureaucratic factors come into play whenever nuclear questions undergo fundamental review. The consequences of nuclear war are potentially so great that each such review in and of itself creates uncertainties about the future. This heightens nervousness and therefore encourages reassuring explanations of what will be done. The process inevitably reopens older debates about deterrence and disarmament, thus creating an environment in which criticism of any changes is more likely than praise. Given this likelihood, staying close to the concepts which have held together public support in the past becomes an attractive political option.

Yet, a careful examination of why changes in our nuclear posture are evolutionary rather than revolutionary suggests that the primary considerations are substantive rather than political or presentational. An examination of the incremental nature of past U.S. nuclear policy formulation can also give some insight into America's nuclear posture in the years ahead as the end of the Cold War is more clearly and firmly in the past.

In presenting the results of the Nuclear Posture Review, the American Secretary of Defense, William Perry, stressed a policy of "lead and hedge." Clearly, he had one eye on the past as he looked to the future. The forces and budgets allocated to countering the Soviet Union continue to be reduced, but

Secretary Perry emphasized the need to hedge against the prospect of the return to power of factions in Russia hostile to the United States and the West. Uncertainty about the permanence of perceived changes is one reason that nuclear policy changes slowly.

The difficulties faced in bringing about bold changes in posture also instill caution. For example, even if democracy remains viable within Russia, uncertainty exists as to when and how the START treaties will be implemented. Secretary Perry noted that the United States desires to lead the way toward greater reductions, and he outlined the multiple steps already taken. Indeed, the United States was willing to go to START I levels unilaterally, but Washington has been reluctant to press ahead toward deeper reductions without some reciprocity and without greater certainty of the survival of Russian democracy.

But what if these circumstances come about? What if, truly, Russia and conditions therein were no longer a notable security concern? Some have suggested that such a real end to the Cold War would negate the need for American nuclear deterrence. Those who hold this view tend to equate the causes of the Cold War with the determinants of the nuclear age. Both are seen as emerging out of the end of World War II.

Opinions differ as to whether the age of nuclear weapons drove the Cold War or vice versa. My own view is that the Cold War pre-dates the Trinity test and is best understood as the natural consequence of the Russian Revolution of 1917. The East-West political and nuclear competitions certainly influenced each other, but I would argue that the adversarial relationship

between the Soviet Union and the United States was driven far more by their political and resulting geostrategic differences than by the nuclear question.

Even if one assumes that the Cold War and the nuclear stalemate are more fundamentally related, however, one still must deal with the question of military threats now independent of the Cold War. It is important to remember that the atomic bomb was not invented because of the Cold War, and that many of the forces which still drive some nations to seek nuclear weapons capability are not products of the Cold War.

The legacy of the Cold War will continue to influence nuclear thinking for many years to come, but the primary consideration with respect to nuclear weapons today must be their relationship to peace and security in the world as it is emerging. One can see this in the three great themes of the public debate during the nuclear age: deterrence, disarmament, and defense.

The concept of deterrence reached its peak in the calculations of the Cold War nuclear balance. The consequences of a nuclear war were seen as so great that the existence of nuclear weapons inevitably introduced greater caution into the behavior of many nations. Deterrence theory has sought to mold this idea of nuclear destruction as an ultimate sanction into an architecture of correct international behavior. NATO doctrine evolved extensively to use nuclear deterrence to reduce incentives for any large scale war, nuclear or conventional.

Yet, the unthinkable destructiveness of any extensive use of nuclear weapons also raised doubts as to the credibility and reliability of nuclear deterrence

even during the Cold War. World War III was avoided, but wars in the Third World were common. Nuclear deterrence was no vaccine for all the diseases of war. Nuclear deterrence is even less well understood in the context of the conflicts anticipated in an unstable post-Cold War world. Is nuclear deterrence relevant in ethnic conflicts and civil wars? What influence would nuclear weapons have on erratic national leaders or terrorists, against whom traditional deterrence theory may apply weakly or not at all.

Calculation that the risk posed by nuclear weapons outweighs, in the post-Cold War environment, the diminished utility of nuclear deterrence has energized efforts to delegitimize nuclear weapons and to press for near-term nuclear disarmament. Such views will be more widely held as the scenarios which once justified large arsenals seem more remote. At the same time, the spread of the knowledge, technology, and fissile materials necessary for building atomic bombs could result in additional nuclear powers emerging even as Russia and the United States reduce their existing arsenals.

This threat of nuclear proliferation, to be highlighted at the upcoming NPT Extension Conference, has heightened calls for commitment to nuclear disarmament on a concrete schedule. The conceptual difficulty is obvious. Some nations insist that they cannot give up options to have nuclear weapons so long as the United States and others have them, but other nations have agreed to forego their own nuclear weapons precisely because of the security they believe is made possible by the existence of American nuclear weapons. Certainly, the nuclear weapons states themselves are unlikely to go to zero nuclear weapons in a world filled with the violence and populated by dictatorial regimes seeking weapons of mass destruction. The more certain

nations say that they will not give up the option for nuclear weapons until the United States gives up its nuclear weapons, the more one can see that the conditions for the elimination of nuclear weapons by the existing nuclear weapons states are not near at hand.

This dilemma continues also with respect to the relationship between defenses and deterrence. The notion that deterrence can be strengthened by guaranteeing a nearly maximum vulnerability of civilian populations to nuclear missile attack, codified bilaterally between the U.S. and the then-U.S.S.R. in the 1972 ABM Treaty, remains one of the most persistent remnants of Cold War thinking about the nuclear question. Opponents of missile defenses saw them as destabilizing in a crisis and promoting an arms race. Great powers might fear that retaliation could be denied. Proponents of defenses saw them as denying certainty to any first strike scenarios and, thus, concluded that defenses were stabilizing. Also, by providing an alternative to deterrence calculations based upon the accumulation of ever more offensive systems, defenses were seen as enhancing the prospects for nuclear arms reductions. Defenses would also be a hedge against war by accident or miscalculation. Both proponents and opponents of missile defenses assumed a tense, militarized adversarial relationship between West and East.

Under post-Cold War conditions, however, does it make sense to continue to collaborate in holding all of our citizens hostage when our stated policy is to cooperate in the reduction of superpower nuclear stockpiles and other nuclear dangers? In an age in which both sides assert their growing friendship and declare that they do not target each other, why would either fear some limited protection for the other. The United States has, for years,

lived with the existence of Russian defenses around Moscow. As ballistic missile technologies spread and as more nations obtain capabilities for chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, interest in defenses will grow. Indeed, as many Russians have pointed out, Russia may face more immediate missile threats because shorter range missiles may proliferate to territory on its periphery.

The concept of disarmament itself has had interesting interplay with deterrence and missile defense policies, and the relationship has not always been adversarial. With respect to deterrence, major arms control agreements such as Start I and II and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) were designed to strengthen deterrence by enhancing stability, but they also provided deep reductions. Likewise, modernization to enhance deterrence frequently created conditions which encouraged numerical reductions. With respect to defenses, many of those who oppose ballistic missile defenses argue that the ABM Treaty has dampened a superpower arms race by assuring the utility of strategic missiles for retaliation even at low levels. On the other hand, theater ballistic missile defenses are now cited, even by some critics of strategic missile defenses, as a means of discouraging the proliferation of ballistic missiles by negating the utility of their acquisition.

Issues of deterrence, defense, and disarmament and of their relationship to each other need to be re-examined in the context of the real world as it is emerging. To take another look at the basic issues under new circumstances does not mean that we must forget the debates of the past. Important lessons were learned during the U.S.-Soviet confrontation. Clearly, much of the logic

that enhanced security during the Cold War will remain valid in the years ahead, and caution in making changes is warranted. Still, the seriousness of the nuclear question requires that we ask important questions again and update our thinking where necessary to reflect new realities.

In the first half of this century, probably over 100 million people were killed in wars by the weapons we now call "conventional." The military and civilian casualties of world wars which engulfed Europe constitute a significant number of these deaths. Particularly since 1989, nearly every edition of every newspaper each day commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of one or another example of the destructiveness of total war. This destructiveness took place before nuclear weapons. In the nuclear age during the Cold War, however, despite some 150 largely undeclared wars, there was no nuclear war, no world war, and no war in central Europe except perhaps the Soviet invasion of Hungary.

It was often said that the nuclear "Sword of Damocles" kept the peace. The existence of nuclear weapons certainly dictated restraint in many cases. Still, the nuclear sword which continues to hang over our heads embodies the potential for unimaginable death and destruction. Did deterrence really work, or are we simply fortunate that nuclear weapons have not been used since the end of World War II? Public opinion remains uncertain about the answer.

"Deterrence or disarmament" is almost certainly not the best way to think about nuclear weapons, but that dichotomy is a recurring theme. With the

end of the Cold War declared and with the 1995 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) extension conference approaching, the debate simmers again. For example some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from the industrial countries are pressing the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and others in the developing world to hold the future of the NPT hostage to a deadline for the elimination of the nuclear weapons of the five recognized nuclear powers.

For years NATO nations responded to such politics of deterrence versus disarmament by endorsing both concepts simultaneously. Some countries stated explicitly that their goal in this incremental process was "general and complete disarmament" (GCD). Such visions were recorded in international documents including Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. In America, domestic law codified this objective, albeit only under conditions consistent with the national security of the United States and its allies. Governments forged majorities, or at least working pluralities, in favor of maintaining the nuclear umbrella while working also to reduce nuclear weapons.

The United States has not taken this disarmament commitment lightly, although progress in implementation has not been easy. Important reductions in nuclear arms have been achieved through the negotiations of the 1980s and early 1990s, but reductions in nuclear weapons began even before the historic Reagan/Bush era. The numbers and explosive force measured in megatonnage of the U.S. nuclear stockpile actually peaked before the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty entered into force, and the numbers had dropped significantly even before the pathbreaking INF Treaty and the two START Treaties. The number of warheads in the stockpile was down by about a quarter, and megatonnage was down by perhaps two-thirds. Numbers

of deployed strategic weapons, of course, grew during the 1970s as large warheads on missiles and bombers were replaced by more numerous, smaller warheads with less megatonnage but more accuracy. Since START I and II and the Bush/Gorbachev/Yeltsin reductions in tactical weapons, however, the even deployed strategic weapons are being reduced by three-fourths and remaining deployed tactical nuclear weapons have been reduced by 90%.

Progress with this step-by-step arms control process — a process that enhanced nuclear stability — balanced the needs of those who favored a strong deterrent with those who advocated disarmament. Polarization was further reduced by deferring some of the difficult questions. How precisely general and complete disarmament would be related to nuclear disarmament and when that ultimate objective might be achieved went unanswered.

Changed circumstances rather than new thinking about nuclear weapons has reopened these nuclear questions. If anything, the renewed debate illustrates how very much disputes over nuclear policy during the Cold War were driven by attitudes external to the nuclear question, attitudes concerning the nature of mankind, the proper attributes of government, the operation of the international system, and the like. The same issues which generate the politics of left versus right and hawk versus dove have their nuclear counterparts. The end of the Cold War has not significantly changed these differences.

One sees this in recent papers on nuclear deterrence after the Cold War, including in papers to be presented to this conference. These think pieces are rich with issues to be addressed, but an examination of their approach to non-proliferation is particularly informative in helping us try to re-examine what

are largely old questions. Both hawks and doves of past years stress that the end of the Cold War means change in our nuclear posture is necessary. Both sides fear that the nuclear danger is rising. Hawks and doves both see non-proliferation as a central challenge. Both see the role of nuclear weapons for the existing nuclear weapons states diminished. On the question of the elimination of nuclear weapons, however, they reach opposite conclusions.

Even the strongest advocates of maintaining nuclear deterrence after the Cold War speak and act with restraint. The majority of post-war deterrence thinkers would lead us down a central path, cautiously looking backward every now and then for the return of old threats. The remaining dangers, and new ones, are serious, but here nuclear weapons are less relevant. They have a stabilizing influence standing in the background reminding everyone to keep conflict within certain bounds. They remain an ultimate recourse. Primarily, however, they are a hedge against the return of old history.

Given the rather frightening post-Cold War world that many deterrence theorists postulate, they detail less of the case for nuclear weapons than might seem warranted. They are particularly silent on the applicability of nuclear deterrence to non-nuclear threats. The low profile they seek for nuclear weapons serves their international security objectives, particularly non-proliferation. Their argument that nuclear weapons are less salient for those who have them is designed to cause other nations to see them as less salient for themselves as well.

These highly self-controlled presentations such as accompanied the recent Nuclear Posture Review avoid hysterics about the spread of weapons of mass destruction and avoid elaboration of exactly how nuclear weapons enhance

the peace. Safety and non-proliferation in the post-Cold War era comes from keeping nuclear questions out of the spotlight while maintaining a low-key deterrent for insurance. Hedging against the return of a Soviet-style nuclear threat is easily understandable to publics and is even more attractive to advocates of a nuclear deterrent because it permits them to be silent on many of the other considerations which may be on their mind.

The strongest voices for disarmament, in contrast, demand that the biggest and most sensitive nuclear questions be brought center stage to be resolved now. Whether we agree with the wisdom of this or not, it certainly will give energy to our re-examination of nuclear deterrence. You are fortunate today to have here at the SMU Tower Center Conference my friend Professor Michael MccGwire. His eloquent commitment to bold disarmament steps has enlivened debate for many years. In his recent publications and in his presentation today, he continues his efforts to lay out a very clear logic chain designed to lead one to judge that all of the nuclear weapons states should give up their nuclear weapons and do so quickly.

Professor MccGwire places non-proliferation at the heart of his argument, although he continues to give so-called vertical proliferation as much weight as horizontal proliferation. The threat to the world even after the Cold War is as much or more from the existing nuclear weapons states as it is from the spread of nuclear weapons to other countries or to terrorists. In Professor MccGwire's view, nuclear weapons are essentially a product of the Cold War. Now that the Cold War is over, we must seize the opportunity to leap toward their elimination. Despite the end of the Cold War, a failure to act decisively now still risks global nuclear conflagration involving the arsenals of the superpowers. Furthermore, the maintenance of any nuclear deterrent by the

nuclear weapons states will justify proliferation by other nations. Thus, the existence of any nuclear weapons even if greatly reduced and confined to the five formal nuclear weapons states will prevent the evolution of a more peaceful world. Given the turbulent world which still lies ahead, MccGwire presses for all to give up nuclear weapons now so that no one will have reason to acquire them in the future.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of Professor MccGwire's presentation is the nature of the world he anticipates — one in which he would have the Western powers give up all nuclear weapons. It is a world in which, if we draw from his writings, the danger of war is great. The United Nations offers little security. Countries such as India, Pakistan, and Israel face threats so severe that the support of others is insufficient to maintain peace. MccGwire's turbulent, new Asia-centric world will pose large military threats. The world is so dangerous that nuclear weapons must be banned for everyone, even if ineffectively.

Why is this essential? MccGwire fears a global nuclear war among the existing nuclear weapons states (even though they have come so far in reducing tensions and dangers). For MccGwire, the democratic U.S. will remain a problem in this new world (although he thinks the totalitarian Soviet Union was not much of a threat even at the height of the Cold War). He fears superpower nuclear war by accidental launch or miscalculation (but we must not cooperate on missile defenses against such accidents or to discourage proliferation because defenses would be seen as provocative).

To counter violations of the nuclear free order, states would maintain huge conventional militaries so as to overwhelm potential proliferators by conventional means (even though small states might feel threatened). By

denuclearizing, the existing nuclear weapons states would establish the high moral ground and eliminate a discriminatory regime (for which he argues that a new arms race beginning from zero is a worthwhile risk, and even the use of a few nuclear weapons by an outlaw state would be a tolerable price).

Professor MccGwire would, of course, seek to avoid these adverse possibilities. He assumes that in this non-nuclear weapons world, verification and export control regimes would be tight (even though export control regimes face diminishing utility, and the desire for a freer, global economy has made them weaker, not stronger). Verification regimes would be cumulative (although the end of the Cold War has seen pressure for less intrusive, less expensive inspection to symbolize friendship). No nation could legally have nuclear weapons (even though many states will become "virtual proliferants" able to deploy secretly within months of a decision and thus quickly move into a nuclear power vacuum alone or with other outlaw states).

Perhaps, to summarize Professor MccGwire's argument is to exaggerate it. Yet, one cannot help but be struck by the degree to which he converts the East-West conflict into a North-South confrontation, all in the name of nuclear disarmament. A wealthy North must be prevented from provoking a sensitive South the way the prosperous West misunderstood a defensive East.

Thus, the contemporary rationales both for nuclear deterrence and for near-term nuclear disarmament update the old arguments to take into account the receding of the Cold War, but fundamentally these arguments have not changed. This should not be surprising. As I noted earlier, nuclear strategists

today feel most comfortable detailing justification of nuclear weapons as a hedge against a return of neo-Soviet threat. Likewise, Professor MccGwire's most passionate argument for disarmament is superpower conflict. Neither side of the debate has really left the Cold War behind. If we are to reduce the real nuclear dangers, however, we must do more than polish up old polemics. We must re-examine the fundamentals in light of a world in transition which we are trying to guide.

What seems missing from contemporary discourse on deterrence versus disarmament is an examination of the fundamental reasons why nations seek nuclear arms and consideration of the conditions necessary before all nations will feel sufficiently secure to be persuaded that all nuclear weapons can be banned.

At the risk of being perceived as more provocative than deterrence theorists of my own persuasion really believe is useful, let me sketch some further old ideas for post-Cold War new thinking. Let me repeat an important point. Nuclear weapons were not invented because of the Cold War, and they have not been acquired and retained simply because of it. The nations which still seek nuclear weapons capability are doing so for reasons which today have little to do with the Cold War. With the end of the Cold War, threshold states should have even less reason to cite the five nuclear weapons states in any justification for nuclear weapons. Indeed, some nations which have forsworn nuclear weapons did so because of the stability strengthened by certain existing nuclear weapons states. Some of these nations required security guarantees or even an alliance with a nuclear umbrella in order to be comfortable with signing away nuclear options.

Whether or not the positions taken by nations threatening to hold the future of the NPT hostage to the nuclear disarmament of the nuclear weapons states are serious or frivolous, substantive or tactical, political or military, such policies undermine the very objective that is stated. The North-South issues and regional tensions which today threaten arms control progress played in the Cold War but were not caused by it. However archaic, they have more to do with historic political and economic concerns than with nuclear threats from the five nuclear weapons states. These issues are driven by regional competition, domestic political conflict, and matters of national ego.

These regional and domestic concerns will have to be met much more successfully than has been done thus far before the incentives for new nations to acquire nuclear weapons will be sufficiently diminished. And until the motivations these concerns generate are significantly reduced, the threat of further proliferation will be such that those who currently have nuclear weapons are unlikely to give them up. If threats, well meaning or otherwise, are not likely to bring about denuclearization, what conditions would promote that cause. That is the real question which needs to be addressed. Let me offer some thoughts today on how that question might be answered.

Nuclear disarmament will require a security architecture far more reassuring than anything envisioned today. The uncertain bipolar stability, crisis management, and anti-proliferation system which emerged in the Cold War must mature in an effective, multilateral form long before nuclear weapons are eliminated. This does not mean world government, but it does mean strengthened international law and civilized norms of behavior. This could not be a world in which the debacle of Yugoslavia takes place. This could not

be a world in which warlords in Somalia can write off the United Nations or dictators in Haiti expel human rights observers. This could not be a world in which a North Korea could deny the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) its rights to inspect, or worse, hold the U.N. Security Council at bay. Indeed, it could not be a world in which totalitarian regimes with advanced nuclear capability could exist.

A phased approach with greater confidence in the process being achieved over time will undoubtedly be necessary. This is particularly important because the level of insecurity felt by all nations is not directly related to the number of warheads in existence. Although a number of scenarios support both sides of the argument, a compelling case exists that the nuclear danger may increase at lower levels if other, fundamental political and security conditions are not greatly improved.

We in the arms control community have often debated the marginal utility of each additional nuclear weapon and have argued that, all other things equal, it is diminishing. Now we must face the reciprocal of our logic. The marginal utility of each remaining weapon, all other things equal, is greater than that of the weapon previously eliminated. The lower the number of nuclear weapons the increased salience of each one. We must not forget that the greatest threshold occurs at the level of just one nuclear weapon.

Although military options may be limited with one or only a few nuclear weapons, the strategic significance is formidable. If nations believe a potentially hostile neighbor has even one nuclear weapon, the implications are profound. If non-nuclear weapons states feel isolated and threatened

without the support of an alliance or nuclear weapons state, they may seek weapons of their own.

The abstract logic of numbers and even more compelling deterrence calculations, of course, do not tell the entire story. Establishing momentum toward a world in which nuclear weapons can be greatly reduced will be aided by positive trends and useful precedents. Demonstrating how restraint can enhance security is important. I would caution, however, that we must not confuse cause with effect, or equate all causes.

For example, it is often suggested that the cause of horizontal proliferation is vertical proliferation. If the United States did not have nuclear weapons, others would not want them or need them. If the United States did not test nuclear weapons, others would not feel threatened. If the United States were to declare that nuclear weapons would only be used to retaliate if its homeland had been struck first by nuclear weapons, potential proliferators would not see the United States as a threat justifying their own nuclear weapons programs. The list of such proposals is long.

The nuclear status of the United States is thus seen as a primary cause of other nations seeking nuclear weapons. When it is countered that few potential proliferants are driven down the nuclear path because of concerns about the American nuclear deterrent, the demands that the United States prime the pump of disarmament frequently shifts to "pretext removal." According to this logic, even if a potential proliferator is making a demand of the United States as a pretext for delaying positive actions of its own, the

United States can call their bluff by meeting the demand. Removal of the pretext would be expected then to place the pressure for the next positive step on the potential proliferator.

The concept of "pretext removal" raises some immediate concerns. Can the elimination of nuclear weapons be based upon the removal of the superficial disputes that are the pretexts when fundamental conditions have not been achieved? Indeed, how could nuclear weapons states take seriously arguments for disarmament which are not sincere? How could there be confidence in security in a world based upon false presentations? Pretext removal may have short term tactical utility, but it is a dangerous basis for policy. We must be careful that we don't fool ourselves, and ourselves only. We need to go behind the pretext and get to the root causes.

One sees this difference between real and unreal disarmament in the long-standing disputes over declaratory policy. "No first use" is a good case in point. It isn't necessary to repeat the debate over the wisdom or lack of wisdom of such pledges to recognize that whatever inhibiting effect they may have in a crisis, they cannot and will not be relied upon. A promise not to use nuclear weapons even under dire circumstances will lack credibility. Still, advocates of "no first use pledges" often say this pledge is the equivalent of not having nuclear weapons. Nobody really believes that either.

When certain nuclear weapons states such as China, and formerly the Soviet Union, argued for "no first use" pledges, their proposals seemed designed to provide moral "top cover" for their own military build-up and to place

NATO nuclear weapons policy in an unfavorable light. Yet, this exploitation of "no first use" pledges has not caused certain other nations and NGOs to reverse their demands for "no first use" pledges. Indeed, such demands have been underlined as part of a broader campaign to "delegitimize" the possession of nuclear weapons even by the five pre-1967 nuclear weapons states.

Delegitimization of any use, or even possession of nuclear weapons, is an expanding concept. Because nuclear war could be so devastating, the legal use of nuclear weapons is continuously being challenged. To support the notion that use of nuclear weapons would be illegitimate, advocates of early disarmament confront deterrence theorists again and again with the question, "Under what circumstances would you use nuclear weapons?" Government spokesmen in particular have little to say. Too much detail will foreclose options and undermine deterrence. Even explanations with little detail could be seen as provocative by states about whom the United States has security concerns. In any case, to those who ask the question, the circumstances presented in the answers seem neither compelling nor likely. Often the answer is simply vague. The debate is not academic. Ideas can, and should, have political consequences. If no legitimate use seems plausible then the case for maintaining a deterrent begins to evaporate.

The problem with the "delegitimization" approach to nuclear disarmament is its likely unintended consequence. It runs the risk of creating a world in which only those with a strict conscience are significantly constrained. Democracies, in particular, will find themselves at a disadvantage. Modern liberal democracies already have some difficulty contemplating the

"unthinkable." When debating the nuclear question, they tend to focus on what is relevant under the current political circumstances rather than what would be relevant during a future military crisis. When the "unthinkable" is also argued to be immoral or illegal, the paralysis can be even greater.

American nuclear doctrine, with notions such as "flexible response," limited options, and the "escalatory ladder," has always sought to fold in consideration of the moral and legal dimensions. Some advocates of near-term nuclear disarmament would take these restraints further. The proposed policy statement that nuclear weapons will be possessed only to deter other nuclear weapons is an example. Such a policy may have an impact on incentives to use nuclear weapons and incentives to acquire them, but it does not preclude their acquisition and use. It is wishful thinking to believe that if the nuclear weapons states simply rid themselves of nuclear weapons, other entities won't have an incentive to acquire them. It is even more weak to argue that if the nuclear weapons states declare that they would only use nuclear weapons to retaliate against nuclear weapons use by others, that potential proliferators will give up their nuclear weapons programs.

These themes aimed largely at the nuclear haves are often part of a broader effort by some nuclear have nots — parties to the NPT and non-Parties — to keep the focus of non-proliferation on the nuclear weapons states so as to keep their own options as unfettered as possible. Again, we return to the real problem that needs to be addressed. How do we create the conditions under which nations are prepared to forego, or continue to forego, nuclear weapons? It will not be through declaratory policies or even strict verification regimes, although these may help. It will be by bringing about real security. The nuclear weapons states have a role to play, in providing

security guarantees and in showing restraint, but they alone are not sufficient. Disarmament is as much in the hands of the non-nuclear weapons states living in troubled regions as it is in the hands of the nuclear weapons states. Every state, and not just the nuclear weapons states, should be expected to move its policies in the right direction, or at least not move in the wrong direction. If real progress is made in regional security, the role of remaining nuclear weapons will increasingly diminish. More and more, remaining weapons will be held in trust for all mankind, stored at ever lower states of immediacy of deployment, and subjected to ever tighter international controls. All of this is possible, but not if disarmament ideology comes to substitute for sound policy.

We cannot yet give a precise prediction of when the nuclear posture of the world will be closer to total disarmament than to deterrence as we have known it, but one thing is clear even now. As we approach the upcoming NPT extension, we must recognize that failure to extend the NPT indefinitely would be a sign that the world is further away from disarmament, not closer.

This work was performed under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Energy by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory under contract No. W-7405-Eng-48.

Technical Information Department • Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory
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